

## CLAIM AMENDMENTS

### Listing of claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1. **(Currently Amended)** A composition suitable for forming cheese, said composition comprising a starter acidification culture and an exopolysaccharide (EPS) fermentation culture wherein said EPS culture contains a viable lactic acid microorganism microorganism selected from the group consisting of *Streptococcus thermophilus* V3, *Lactococcus lactis* ssp *cremoris* 322, *Lactobacillus sakei* 570, and *Leuconostoc mesenteroides* 808, wherein said lactic acid microorganism microorganism is capable of producing an enzyme, and wherein said enzyme is capable of producing an EPS.
2. **(Currently Amended)** A composition according to claim 1 wherein the starter acidification culture comprises a microorganism microorganism that is capable of fermenting lactic acid.
3. **(Original)** A composition according to claim 2 wherein said starter acidification culture is a culture of a lactic acid bacterium.

Claims 4-5. **(Cancelled)**

6. **(Currently Amended)** A composition according to claim 1 wherein said EPS production occurs separately from acidification by said starter acidification culture.
7. **(Currently Amended)** A composition according to claim 6 wherein the EPS is produced *in situ*.

8. **(Original)** A composition according to claim 7 wherein said EPS is produced in the presence of a suitable enzyme substrate selected from the group consisting of sucrose, fructose, glucose, maltose, lactose, stachyose, raffinose and verbascose.
9. **(Original)** A composition according to claim 8, wherein the EPS is a hetero-EPS.
10. **(Currently Amended)** A composition according to claim 9, wherein the lactic acid ~~microorganism~~ microorganism of the EPS fermentation culture is *Streptococcus thermophilus* V3.
11. **(Currently Amended)** A composition according to claim 9 wherein the lactic acid ~~microorganism~~ microorganism is *Lactococcus lactis* ssp. *cremoris* 322.
12. **(Original)** A composition according to claim 7, wherein the EPS is a homo-EPS.
13. **(Cancelled)**
14. **(Currently Amended)** A composition according to claim [[13]] 12, wherein the lactic acid bacterium of the EPS fermentation culture is *Lactobacillus sakei* 570.
15. **(Currently Amended)** A composition according to claim [[13]] 12, wherein the lactic acid bacterium of the EPS fermentation culture is *Leuconostoc mesenteroides* 8O8.
16. **(Currently Amended)** A process of preparing Use of a composition to prepare a cheese product comprising adding to a medium suitable for forming cheese, a composition according to claim 1, wherein the composition comprises a starter acidification culture and an EPS fermentation culture wherein said EPS fermentation culture contains a viable lactic acid microorganism microorganism of said composition produces, wherein said lactic acid microorganism is capable of producing an enzyme, and wherein said enzyme is capable of producing an EPS.

17. **(Currently Amended)** A cheese product prepared by the process of claim 16, wherein said cheese product comprises ~~using~~ the composition according to claim 1.

18. **(Original)** A cheese product according to claim 17 wherein the cheese product is a soft cheese product.

19. **(Currently Amended)** A process ~~cheese product~~ according to claim [[18]] 16 wherein said EPS is capable of modulating the moisture level of said product.

20. **(Currently Amended)** A process ~~cheese product~~ according to claim [[19]] 16 wherein the target moisture is capable of being achieved by optimising whey release during curd processing.

21. **(Currently Amended)** A process ~~cheese product~~ according to claim [[17]] 16 wherein said EPS increases the stability and/or elasticity of said curd.

22. **(Cancelled)**

23. **(Currently Amended)** A process ~~cheese product~~ according to claim [[22]] 21 wherein said curd is capable of being manipulated with conventional curd manipulating equipment.

24. **(Previously Presented)** A cheese product according to claim 17 wherein said EPS is capable of forming a cheese curd containing about 50% moisture level.

25. **(Original)** A cheese product according to claim 24, wherein said curd has less than 5% loss in moisture during ripening to a cheese product.

26. **(Currently Amended)** A process ~~cheese product~~ according to claim [[17]] 16 wherein said EPS is capable of improving at least one of the texture, aroma, flavour, mildness,

consistency, body, mouth feel, firmness, viscosity, gel fracture, wheying off, syneresis, structure and/or organoleptic properties, nutrition and/or health benefits of the cheese product.

27. **(Currently Amended)** A method for forming a cheese ~~the method~~ comprising admixing a composition with a medium suitable for forming cheese so as to form a cheese curd containing about 50% moisture and wherein during ripening of the cheese product less than about 5% moisture is lost; wherein the composition is a composition according to claim 1.

28. **(Original)** A cheese product obtained according to the method of claim 27.

29. **(Cancelled)**

30. **(Currently Amended)** A process for *in situ* production of an EPS comprising the steps of:

- providing a composition according to claim 1, and
- permitting growth of said ~~microorganism~~ microorganism so as to produce the EPS, and
- ~~— optionally isolating said EPS.~~

31. **(Original)** A process according to claim 30 wherein said EPS is a homo-EPS.

32. **(Currently Amended)** A process according to claim 30 wherein the ~~microorganism~~ microorganism is *Lactobacillus sakei* 570.

Claims 33-36. **(Cancelled)**

37. **(Currently Amended)** A culture of *Lactobacillus sakei* strain 570 deposited as DSM 15889 at the Deutsche Sammlung von Mikroorganismen und Zellkulturen GnbH.

38. **(Cancelled)**